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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

12

7 October 1960

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist China's Nuclear Weapons Programs

The attached discussion of Communist China's capabilities and probable nuclear weapons program updates certain information and judgments contained in NIE 100-3-60, "Sino-Soviet Relations", 9 August 1960.

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist China's Nuclear Weapons Program

1. We believe the Chinese Communists have given a very high priority to a nuclear weapons program. They almost certainly consider that a demonstration of their capability to produce nuclear weapons would confirm their claim to great power status. We believe that the Chinese Communists will carry their nuclear weapons program forward as rapidly as feasible.

2. Our evidence with respect to Communist China's nuclear program is scanty as is our information about the nature and extent of Soviet aid. In what we estimate to be the present state of Chinese Communists competence, the carrying out of fissionable materials production programs requires significant Soviet assistance in the form of technicians, designs, and equipment. As we have estimated earlier, we believe that the Soviets have been moving at a deliberate pace in assisting the Chinese

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in the nuclear field, seeking to hold Chinese impatience and discontent at a level consistent with the Soviet view of the best interests of the Sino-Soviet relationship. Recent evidence strongly suggests that in the past the USSR has given the Chinese Communists more technical assistance toward the eventual production of nuclear weapons than we have previously believed likely. This evidence is insufficient to establish how much assistance has actually been given, although we believe the aid has been fairly substantial and increasing over the years, at least until recently.

3. The USSR has provided Communist China with a nuclear research reactor and is training nuclear scientists in the Joint Institute for Nuclear Research at Dubna, USSR. The exploitation of native uranium resources has been underway, with Soviet assistance, since 1950. Over 10 deposits are now being worked, and we believe that ore with a uranium metal equivalent of several hundred tons is being mined annually and retained in China. The Chinese Communists have probably initiated the processing of uranium ores into metals, and this leads us to believe they are currently building a plutonium production reactor. Although there is no conclusive evidence, there are strong indications that they may also be building a U-235 gaseous diffusion plant.

4. On the basis of the scanty evidence available, we now believe that the most probable date at which the Chinese Communists

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could detonate a first nuclear device is sometime in 1963, though it might be as late as 1964, or as early as 1962, depending upon the actual degree of Soviet assistance.\* Given direct Soviet assistance in fissionable materials, designs, and fabrications, the Chinese could produce a nuclear detonation in China at almost any time in the immediate future. On the other hand, if as a result of Sino-Soviet dissensions there were a lessening of Soviet assistance in the nuclear field, the Chinese Communists progress would be substantially retarded.

5. While the explosion of a nuclear device would give the Chinese Communists political and propaganda rewards, they would almost certainly proceed to create an operational nuclear capability as quickly as feasible. However, it will take then several years after the explosion of a nuclear device to produce a significant stockpile of weapons. Moreover, given economic limitations and the

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\* This estimate on the timing of a detonation represents the assessment of the Central Intelligence Agency. However, there is a minority view in the community which holds that available new evidence is insufficient to warrant the view that the Chinese might be able to detonate a device much earlier than 1964. Moreover, dissensions between Moscow and Peiping and the reported withdrawal of Soviet technicians may in fact retard Chinese progress. Finally, the possibility should be considered that the Soviets might provide Peiping with a nuclear device for prestige purposes and that this would not necessarily enhance Chinese nuclear weapons capability.

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realities of geography, they would probably rely initially on aircraft as delivery vehicles. They have a few piston medium bombers of the BULL type, which could reach Japan, Taiwan, Okinawa, South Korea, and South Vietnam, as well as additional areas in Southeast Asia. In the next few years we believe they may receive some jet medium bombers from the USSR. We believe that they will also go forward with the development of ballistic missiles, probably concentrating in the first place on a missile with a range of 200-500 n.m., capable of carrying a fission warhead. Such missiles would give them coverage of most of the targets mentioned above. If deployed in Tibet, such missiles would also give coverage of the major cities of northern India. We believe that they could develop such missiles by 1968-1969 or, with considerable Soviet assistance, much earlier. We do not believe they could, by themselves, produce the 6,500 n.m. missile necessary to give them a capability against the US until well after 1970.

6. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by Communist China would have important effects on its relations both within and without the Sino-Soviet Bloc. The USSR probably has serious misgivings as to the effect of such acquisition on Sino-Soviet relations,

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fearing that it will prejudice the USSR's claim to undisputed leadership of the Bloc and lessen the degree of Soviet influence on Communist Chinese actions, particularly those which might risk war with the US. The Soviets have nevertheless felt that they had to extend some aid to the Chinese Communists. The pace of Soviet aid has been deliberate and there has been no apparent assistance in the field of missile delivery systems.

7. The acquisition of nuclear weapons by the Chinese Communists would probably increase the intransigence of Chinese foreign policy, particularly towards its neighbors. The prestige of Peiping would rise in Southeast Asia and the incentives for accommodation in such countries as Burma, Cambodia, Thailand, and even South Vietnam and Indonesia would increase. A demand by Nationalist China, the Philippines, and South Korea for a nuclear capability of their own would probably ensue. Communist China's acquisition of nuclear weapons capability would face Japan with a critical situation, probably leading to a polarization of forces between those advocating strict neutralism (or even accommodation with the Bloc), and those favoring the strengthening of ties with US and possibly acquisition of their own nuclear capability. The

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outcome of such an internal dispute cannot now be predicted. India's concern would also be great, and the government might decide to undertake a nuclear weapons program. This would be more likely if, at the time, Nehru has been succeeded by a less neutralist government.

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